

# Emotional Intelligence and the Conflict Resolution Repertoire of Couples in Tertiary Institutions in Imo State

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## Abstract

This study is a descriptive survey that investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions. A sample of 250 married people were drawn from the population of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Two researcher made and validated instruments were used in collecting data for the study. They are: Couples' Conflict Resolution Repertoire (CCRR) and Emotional Intelligence Scale for Couples (EISC). One research question was formulated to guide the study. One hypothesis was raised and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Mean, standard deviation and Pearson product moment correlation were the statistical tools employed in analyzing the data collected. The result of the analysis indicated a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and couples' conflict resolution repertoire. Finally, it was recommended that couples should be given training on emotional intelligence skills as well as conflict resolution skills during their marriage preparatory classes prior to their wedding. Counsellors in tertiary institutions should occasionally organize seminars and workshops on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills for their married staff.

## Introduction

Couple according to Collins (2003) means two people united by betrothal or marriage. They are the two people to whom each is the significant other of the other. By inference therefore, couples live together and share a lot. Thus, when two people share a living space, habits, dreams and often children, there are bound to be times that they think differently and have different opinions on how to handle situations. If this does not occur, it is likely that one partner is avoiding a confrontation, submerging his/her identity or always giving in. None of these is healthy for couples over a long period of time. In other words, conflicts are inevitable among genuine couples. However, the researchers' definition of couples in this study refers to any married man or woman and not necessarily the man and the woman who are together. This is because it was almost impossible to find husband and wife that are together working in the same institution.

Conflict, a serious and protracted disagreement or disharmony that arise whenever two or more people get together, happens to be a normal part of any healthy relationship. The relationship could be in the family at work place or in the larger society. Regardless of the magnitude of conflict in question, it has the capacity to affect people physically, socially, psychologically and even spiritually. This is because conflict, when mismanaged could cause a great harm to relationship but when handled in a respectful positive way, provides an opportunity to strengthen relationship ties. Again, when conflict is not perceived as threatening or punishing, it fosters freedom, creativity and safety in relationships. Hence, learning how to deal with conflicts rather than avoiding it becomes very crucial. This could be achieved by imbibing conflict resolution skills into ones repertoire. This is especially important for the couples on whom the onerous task of building families rests, bearing in mind that the family constitutes the nucleus of the society.

Conflict resolution otherwise known as reconciliation is conceptualized as the process involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict by meeting at least some of each side's needs and addressing their interests. Heitler (2012) views it as a collaborative problem solving and cooperatively talking together process that leads to choosing a plan of action that both couples can feel good about. Conflict management and resolutions are very essential for having a productive work life as well as harmonious family and community living. Conflict resolution skills which could be acquired are discussions, written communications, goal clarifications, compromise, diplomacy, focus on issues, negotiations and accommodating others are: mediation, voting, respect for the other party and creative peace building (Collins, 2007; Dontigney, 2015; Heitler, 2001 and Schreiner, 2015).

In addition, Schreiner (2015) opined that for one to successfully acquire conflict resolution skills he needs to imbibe the following principles: quick stress relief; emotional awareness; open lines of communication; use of humor and play; forgiveness; exploration of difference in forecast and risk preferences. However, Dustin (2015) presented three processes involved in conflict resolution as follows: recognition that there is a problem that needs to be solved; exploration of the underlying concerns and creation of a mutually agreeable solution. Conflict resolution repertoire of couples therefore implies the couples' acquisition and application of conflict resolution skills in resolving their differences which are bound to occur.

Emotional Intelligence (EIQ) is the ability to perceive and monitor one's own emotions and that of other people and as well label them appropriately to be used as a guide to thinking and behaviour. For Segal & Smith (2015), it is the capacity to identify, use, understand and manage emotions in positive ways to relieve stress; communicate effectively; empathize with others; overcome challenges and diffuse conflicts. Akinboye (2003) views it as the ability to organize emotion driven perception, intuition and thought processes. In addition, it is also the ability to express such emotion laden behaviour interpersonally as well as build trust, honesty, fairness, human dignity and integrity in life. Similarly, Hakimi & Bashar (2015) describe it as the ability to stay focused under or within conflict, handle criticism, diffuse anger and manage other forms of confrontations that can make or break one in life. Hence, emotional intelligence can be simply put as the art of handling emotionally charged situations.

According to Kidwell and Hasford (2014), emotional intelligence affects an individual and it also affects one's performance at work; one's physical health; mental health and inter-personal relationships. By understanding one's own emotions and how to control them, the individual is better able to express how he feels and understand how others feel. This makes for more effective communication and stronger relationships both at work and in one's personal life. This culminates in the achievement of both career and personal goals and a more fulfilled life. Thus, Segal & Smith (2015) concludes that when it comes to happiness and success in life, Emotional Intelligence (EIQ) matters as much as intellectual ability (IQ).

In line with the above conceptions, Hakimi and Bashar (2014) in their study on emotional intelligence, self concept and academic performance of senior secondary school students in Sokoto Metropolis established a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and students' academic performance. Similarly, results of the study conducted by Sjoberg (2001) on emotional intelligence and life adjustment showed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life adjustment. In addition, in a study carried out on the relationship between emotional intelligence and career performance of Nigerian Police, Benue State command by Agbe, Gbenda, Ortese and Yusuf (2012), emotional intelligence proved to have a significant relationship with police career performance.

On the contrary, result of a study carried out by Kolo (2006) on the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance of Niger State students established insignificant relationship between the two variables. In the light of the above expositions, this study is determined to find out whether emotional intelligence has any relationship with the conflict resolution repertoire of couples in the tertiary institutions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is aimed at ascertaining whether any relationship that exists between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

### **Research Question**

This research question was raised to guide the study:

What relationship exists between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution repertoire of married couples in tertiary institutions in Imo state?

### **Hypothesis**

This hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State

### **Method**

This study employed a correlational, descriptive survey design in its effort to determine the extent of relationship between the two variables. The population of the study is made up of all couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State numbering five (5) institutions while the target population is all couples in Alvan Ikoku University of Education with a total population of 1834 married people. The study sample was made up of 250 couples. Best (1981) statistical formular for sample size selection was used in arriving at the sample size.

Two researcher made instruments were used for the study. They include: Couples' Conflict Revolution Repertoire Scales (CCRRS) and Emotional Intelligence Scales for Couples (EISC). Both instruments comprised

of two sections, A & B. While section A elicited demographic data on the respondents, the Section B's were the items structured in the form of statements to determine the respondents' levels of agreement/disagreement on the 4 point Likert type scale. The first instrument (CCRRS) comprised of 15 items derived from vast literature on conflict resolution skills. The second instrument (EISC) was made up of 20 items developed from the various components of emotional intelligence.

These instruments were validated by three experts. Two from Imo State University, Owerri of Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation Department while the third in Guidance and Counselling Department was from Alvan Ikoku University of Education, Owerri. They established both the face and content validity of the instruments. For further validation, a trial test was conducted on eighty (80) couples from Imo State University, Owerri. The reliability of the instruments were established using Cronbach Alpha reliability measure. The internal consistency yielded reliability coefficient of 0.78 and 0.81 respectively.

The researchers personally administered the instruments and collected data used for the study. A total of two hundred and fifty (250) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents and all were returned and used for analysis.

## Results

The results of the study were presented below based on the research question and the hypothesis.

**Research Question: What relationship exists between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State?**

**Table 1: Summary of Correlation analysis of the relationship that exists between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State.**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	Remark
Emotional Intelligence	250	41.86	6.59	0.72	Positive
Conflict Resolution	250	52.80	5.48		and High

The result indicated on the table above shows that the mean response of respondents on the Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Repertoire are 41.86 and 52.80 respectively. The correlation coefficient of the relationship between the above two responses by respondents is 0.72. The decision therefore is that the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Repertoire of couples is positive and high.

**Hypothesis I: There is no significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State**

**Table 2: Result of correlation analysis testing the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State.**

Variable	N	Correlation	Level of Significance	Probability	Remarks
Emotional Intelligence	250	0.72	0.05	0.00	Positive
Conflict Resolution	250				and High

### \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The table 2 shows that the level of significance (0.05) is greater than the probability (0.00). This result rejects the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State and accepts the alternate hypothesis that there is

significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicated that there was significant relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution repertoire of couples in tertiary institutions in Imo State. This corroborates the findings of earlier researchers such as Hakimi & Bashar (2014); Hakimi & Bashar (2015); Sjoberg (2001); Agbe, Gbenda, Ortese & Yusuf (2012) which all indicated a positive and high relationship between emotional intelligence and police career performance, academic performance and life adjustment respectively.

On the other hand, this result negates the findings of Kolo (2006) which established a nil relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance of Niger State secondary school students.

### **Recommendations**

Having established a high and positive relationship between emotional intelligence and couples' conflict resolution repertoire, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Training on emotional skills should be incorporated in the marriage preparatory classes organized for couples prior to their wedding.
2. Conflict resolution skills should also be taught to couples during marriage preparatory classes.
3. Counselling departments of tertiary institutions should organize workshops and seminars for their married couples' staff from time to time whereby among the issues to be handled should include emotional intelligence skills as well as conflict resolution skills.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is quite obvious that stability in the home helps one to develop self understanding and self confidence and consequently become more effective and productive in his endeavours. Consequently, it has been established in this study that the acquisition of emotional intelligence skills significantly helps one to have a good grasp and as well effectively put to use as the situation demands, some conflict resolution skills that are needed for effective resolution of crises between couples. Efforts should therefore be made to ensure that couples imbibe these skills before venturing into marriages as this will make for emotionally stable couples as well as more productive staff.

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